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From the Office of the Director of Health

Health and Safety After the Flood

As the floodwaters recede, the Springfield-Greene County Health Department urges Greene County residents to use caution.

“People should avoid contact with floodwater whenever possible, as it may contain contaminants and unseen hazards,” says spokesperson Jaci McReynolds. “If a person must be in contact with the water, they should wear rubber boots and rubber gloves, and use soap and water to frequently wash hands and skin exposed to the floodwater.”

McReynolds also encourages residents to be sure they are protected against tetanus. Tetanus booster shots should be given every 10 years, and are available at the health department’s Westside Public Health Center, located at 660 S Scenic. Call 874-1220 for details.

Some food items that have been out of temperature or in contact with floodwater need to be discarded.

- Discard foods needing refrigeration if the electricity has been off for more than six hours.
- Don’t refreeze foods that have thawed. Discard them if they’ve been thawed for more than four hours.
- If they have been in contact with floodwater, discard fresh meat and poultry, prepared and processed foods, home canned foods, packages that are not airtight and foods in paper containers.
- Discard canned goods that are punctured, bulging or leaking.
- Because seepage can carry harmful bacteria, discard crown-capped bottles and screw-top glass containers that have been in contact with floodwater.

Other items that should be discarded if they have come in contact with floodwater include:

- Large soft items that have been in contact with water for two or more days, such as couches, chairs, mattresses and carpet. Even though you cannot see it, mold is growing on these items. People who are sensitive to mold may experience nasal stuffiness, eye irritation, wheezing or skin irritation. People with severe allergies to mold or with chronic lung illness may experience more severe reactions, including fever, shortness of breath or mold infection in their lungs.
- Plastic items like kitchen utensils, plates, dishes, tupperware and baby bottle nipples.
- Kitchen utensils that are wooded or have cracks, such as wooden spoons and cutting boards.
- Leather or paper products.
- Garden produce.
- Medicines and cosmetics.

Some items may be successfully cleaned.

- Bedding and other soft items should be washed in hot water with bleach.
- Children's toys, utensils, dishware and small items with hard surfaces should be washed with soap and water and then disinfected by immersing for one minute in a solution of four tablespoons of bleach to two gallons of water.
- Pots and pans can be sterilized by boiling them for at least ten minutes.
- Items that a baby may put in his mouth should be boiled.
- Items that are too large to immerse, or surfaces like walls, decking and doors should be washed with soap and water and then wiped down with a solution of one cup of bleach to one gallon of water.

Be sure to protect yourself while cleaning up.

- Wear rubber gloves and rubber boots.
- Use eye protection and a mask while cleaning with bleach solutions.
- Be sure your home is well ventilated.
- Never mix bleach with ammonia or other cleaning solutions, as it may create toxic fumes.

Also, to avoid electrical shock and damage to items, be sure any electrical appliances that have been in contact with floodwater are thoroughly cleaned, reconditioned and dry before operating them.

For more information visit <http://health.springfieldmo.gov>.

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